

# Be Bear Aware

## Objectives

Students will identify ways to avoid unwanted or unsafe encounters with bears. Students will teach others how to help bears from becoming a problem in the neighborhood, at home, or at a campsite.

## Method

Students will conduct a classroom Bear Aware Campaign by creating posters, news stories, and conducting a neighborhood survey.

## California Standards

*Science:* Life Science 3b, c; Investigations 6a, b  
*Language Arts:* Writing 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 2.3; Written and Oral 1.0, 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7

## Materials

Writing materials, poster materials, classroom bulletin board, copies of activity pages

## Background

As residents of the Tahoe area, we have a responsibility for keeping our wildlife wild. Conflicts between humans and bears are most often created by people. People have a responsibility to wildlife whose habitat they are sharing. The best way to avoid conflict with bears is to prevent it. The prevention of nuisance bears relies on actions taken by every person in bear country. To control the situation, it is necessary to take personal responsibility to reduce conflicts and prevent the loss of property and possible harm.

There are benefits to living in harmony with bears. The bear's presence in nature indicates the good health of our natural environment. Natural areas that support bears are home for many other animal species. Steps taken to prevent bears from becoming nuisance animals also prevent other species from becoming problems (such as raccoons, skunks, fox, opossums, mice, and rats), and thereby decreases human and pet exposure to diseases (e.g. rabies) and property damage.

## Procedure

1. Define the term "nuisance" bear. A "nuisance" bear is one that has become habituated to human sources of food; these bears also become conditioned to human presence resulting in bold behavior. Nuisance bears get into all kinds of trouble from raiding garbage cans and eating pet food to occasionally killing livestock and causing property damage. Nuisance bears are created by common mistakes that homeowners, campers, and hikers innocently or unknowing make. Feeding bears either by accident or on purpose is the number one source of the problem.
2. Explain that the class will create a "Be Bear Aware" Campaign. Students will make posters, write news stories and conduct a neighborhood survey to evaluate how well people are prepared for preventing bear encounters and will document areas that need attention.
3. Discuss the idea that bears do not know public land boundaries and roam throughout forests. Bears are attracted to residential areas and camp sites because they are attracted to many different foods such as garbage, bird seed, squirrel feed, pet food, compost piles, and greasy barbecue grills. Once a bear finds something it likes, it may return to the same area several times (even after food is removed) or search around the general area for similar foods. Some bears become used to people and may even appear tame. However, bears are wild animals and are unpredictable. Noise such as shouting, clapping, or a horn blast may scare off a bear. Installing motion sensitive lights outside the house may also help. A bear should not be teased if it fails to respond to efforts to frighten it. These methods are only temporary solutions. The best solution is prevention, keeping areas clean, and to stop leaving food out for bears.
4. Review "Avoiding Bear Problems." Explain that each student will create public service posters from the list on "Avoiding Bear Problems."

5. Have students share their posters with the class. Discuss the student's message.
6. Have each student write a news story with the idea from their poster. The message will instruct others how to "Be Bear Aware" and how to avoid having problems with bears.
7. Create a classroom bulletin board with the posters and news stories.
8. Give each student a copy of the *Be Bear Aware* neighborhood survey. Ask students to view their neighborhood and complete the survey. The survey will indicate areas that need improvement as well as the areas that demonstrate responsible human action. Instruct students to bring the completed survey scorecard back to class.

NOTE: Use this exercise to demonstrate the skills of observations and inferences. Students observe examples of human behaviors and then make inferences about the results of this behavior. For example, observed garbage in yard infers bear visit and destruction.

9. Have students share the results of their neighborhood survey. How can students help inform others to be bear aware? Ask students for suggestions on how to promote safety for people and safety for bears. Encourage students to share the information they have learned about bears with others (kids and adults). Remind them that they can make a difference by reporting problems to wildlife agencies, educating their parents and friends about ways to avoid having problems with bears. NOTE:

Door hangers are a good non-invasive method to share information and call attention to possible problems. Computer generated door hangers can be created by students.

10. Provide each student with a copy of the pledge certificate. Instruct students to decorate the certificate, write their pledge actions, sign, and date. The certificates may be taken home and placed in a prominent place.

## Extensions

1. Student may create a community Be Bear Aware Newsletter using the art work and written information they have done. Use information from other activities in this unit to develop an educational tool to share what they have learned with other students and adults.
2. Have the students write and produce a play about the best solutions to prevent bear problems or about correct behavior if they encounter a bear. The play may be presented for parents as well as the student body.

## Evaluation

1. Have students complete this sentence "If you really care, don't \_\_\_\_\_ the bears!"
2. Have students explain five things that can be done to prevent bear problems.
3. Have students write and explain two things they should do if they encounter a bear.

Activity written by Bobbie Winn, California Department of Fish and Game.

# AVOIDING BEAR PROBLEMS

- Never approach a bear. Bears are wild animals and can be dangerous.
- Never feed a bear. Feeding a bear brings both you and the bear into harms way.
- Don't leave food out, unclean BBQ grills, pet food, or garbage etc...this can attract bears.
- Keep pet foods in a secure indoor area, even at night. Feed pets inside.
- Only put bird feeders outside November through March and always hang feeders so they are inaccessible to bears.
- Store garbage in a secure indoor area until pick-up day.
- Don't overfill garbage cans. Wait to put trash out until collection day.
- Install bear-proof garbage cans and bear-proof community dumpsters.
- Do not compost meat products or sweet scraps.
- Keep garbage cans clean and deodorize them with bleach or ammonia.
- Harvest fruit off trees as soon as it is ripe and promptly collect fruit that falls.
- Securely block access to potential hibernation sites such as crawl spaces under decks and buildings.
- Do not leave trash, groceries, or animal feed in your car.
- Don't leave any scented products outside, even non-food items such as suntan lotion, insect repellent, soap, or candles.
- Keep doors and windows closed and locked. Scents can lure bears inside.
- While camping, keep campsite clean, remove trash, and clean up immediately after meals.
- Clean BBQ grills after use.

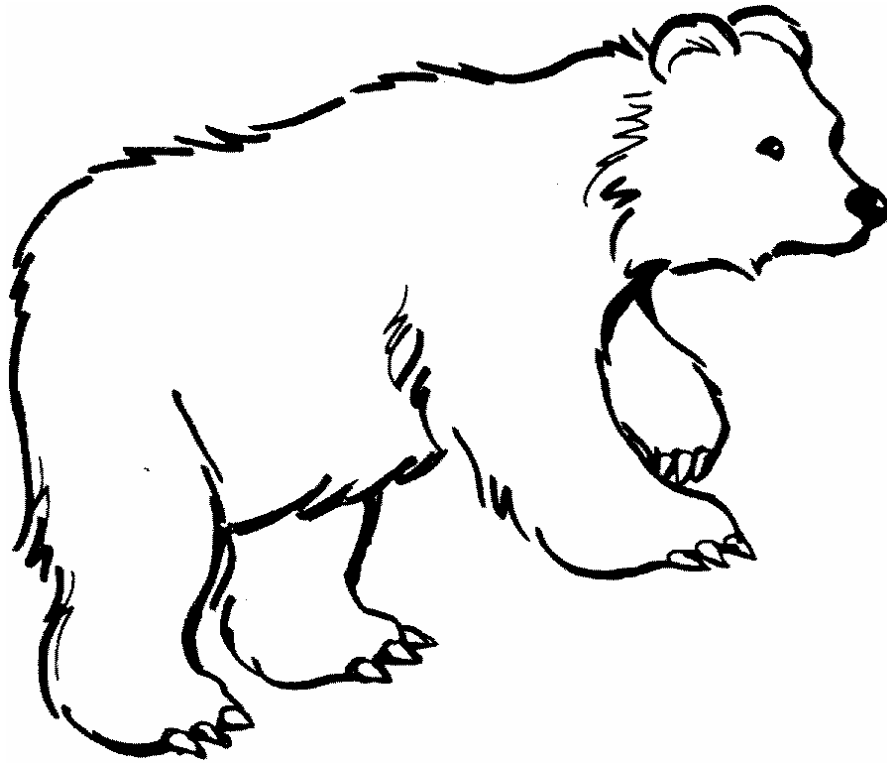


# Neighborhood Survey

Observe conditions in your neighborhood and help prevent possible bear problems. Observations should be made as you walk around or play. DO NOT go door to door. Check areas that need improvement and areas that show responsible action.

Yes    No

1.    ☐    ☐    Pet foods are kept indoors and pets fed inside.
2.    ☐    ☐    Bird feeders are outside only November through March.
3.    ☐    ☐    Garbage is stored in a secure indoor area until pick-up day.
4.    ☐    ☐    There are no overfilled garbage cans. Trash is put out only on collection day.
5.    ☐    ☐    Bear-proof garbage cans and community dumpsters are installed.
6.    ☐    ☐    Fruit is harvested as soon as it is ripe and fallen fruit is promptly collected.
7.    ☐    ☐    Access to potential hibernation site is securely blocked.
8.    ☐    ☐    No trash, groceries, or animal feed is left in cars.
9.    ☐    ☐    No scented products are left outside (i.e. suntan lotion, insect repellent, soap, or candles).
10.   ☐    ☐    BBQ grills are cleaned after use.



# I Care for Tahoe's Bear!

This is how I will help the Tahoe Black Bear:

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Name

Date